

KAZAKHSTAN MAKING PROGRESS IN DEMOCRACY, FREE MARKETS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GUTKNECHT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, I return this week from monitoring an election in Kazakhstan. The election to the lower house of Kazakhstan's parliament, the Majilis, has been described by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as a "tentative step in the country's transition to democracy."

While the election was not perfect, the Kasakhs acknowledged this, it was an important step toward true representative self-government.

I have heard many negative comments towards the Kasakh government recently. Certainly the attempted transfer of MIG 21s to North Korea was a major security concern for the United States. However, the Kasakh government dealt with this matter swiftly, fired those responsible, and put in place mechanisms to prevent this from occurring again.

More importantly, we are not hearing the positive steps occurring in Kazakhstan. The Kasakh government is privatizing state assets, encouraging small business, and taking seriously the business of doing, of building real democratic institutions. Do not forget, voluntarily, Kazakhstan unilaterally disarmed its nuclear arsenal.

The United States needs to recognize that this secular nation, bordered by Russia on the north, China to the east, and several nations to the south and west that may export Islamic fundamentalism, really wants an economic and strategic relationship with us.

They understand that we want to see evolving liberal democratic institutions, free markets, and a real respect for human rights. We need to understand that Kazakhstan has only 7 years under its belt as an independent nation, and that they are taking important steps in these matters.

Let us look at Kazakhstan as an evolving partner, and let us reward their important steps in the fields of democracy, free markets, human rights with a stronger diplomatic and economic relationship. I invite my colleagues to visit this beautiful country and see for themselves the progress that is being made.

MEDICARE PAYMENTS AND THE STATE OF FLORIDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Ms. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, today we kicked off Voices Against Violence, a congressional teen conference with a goal of involving young people

in a nationwide debate on ways for legislators and others to prevent youth violence, both nationally and in local schools and communities. More than 400 students from across the country will participate in the teen conference. I want to thank the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT) for his leadership in making this conference possible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to discuss an issue that is very important to the citizens of my State of Florida. The cuts in the Medicare and Medicaid payments to the health providers in my State are causing a crisis.

With Florida's large senior population, no other single payer impacts health care providers in the State more than Medicare. With almost 3 million Medicare beneficiaries, Florida has the second largest Medicare population in the United States. Almost one in every five Floridians qualify for Medicare, the highest percent of any State in the country. Unfortunately for those hard-working people, the cuts in Medicare funding in the Balanced Budget Act are preventing them from getting the care that they need and deserve.

Florida's home health agencies, skilled nursing facilities, medical equipment providers, Teaching and Disproportionate Share Hospitals are in a state of crisis. Especially in the rural areas, these organizations are being forced to bear an extreme financial burdens, causing them to stretch their budgets dangerously thin and forcing them to provide substandard care to their patients.

Every single day in my office I receive calls and letters from patients and their providers who tell me horror stories of people being sent home early from the hospital, having therapy cut off before they are properly healed, and being denied care altogether. This is not right.

I hear from my colleagues that we have a huge surplus that we need to give back to the people. This Congress can start giving it back to the people by providing adequate funding for the health care for our seniors who have already paid for it and so desperately need it.

I am glad to hear that my colleagues on the Committee on Ways and Means are moving forward on this issue, and I am looking forward to working with them to restore these dangerous cuts. Let us do the right thing and restore these massive cuts in Medicare reimbursement.

CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL TO BE AWARDED TO PRESIDENT AND MRS. FORD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, just a short time ago, we passed a resolution allowing the use of the rotunda for a ceremony to grant a Congressional

Gold Medal to President and Mrs. Ford. I would like to give some background information on that award. I was very pleased to sponsor the bill that would grant them this medal because they have served this country so well for so many years.

What is unique about this medal, this particular medal, and what is different than any previous medal in history, is that it will be awarded to both President and Mrs. Ford. I believe it very important to recognize the part that both of them played in the history of our country.

Mrs. Ford contributed a great deal to the health of the women of this Nation by discussing very frankly and openly the fact that she had breast cancer. Now, that may seem rather mundane today, but at the time she developed breast cancer, she was the First Lady in the White House. Breast cancer was not discussed in polite society. It was whispered about. As a result, many women did not know what caused breast cancer. They did not know about self-examination. They did not know what treatments were available.

Mrs. Ford announced that she had this terrible disease. She described the symptoms to this Nation. She worked with the media to publicize the nature of breast cancer. She was very effective in alerting the women of this Nation to the need for breast examination and treatment.

In addition to that, later on in life, due to a number of pain medications that she was taking and the use of alcohol, Mrs. Ford recognized the need for treatment for alcoholism and drug dependency and started the Betty Ford Clinic. This has been a life-saving institution for many, many people. She still takes a personal interest in it, still visits with new patients as they come in, and has been very effective in helping many people recover from substance abuse or alcohol abuse.

President Ford, of course, is well known as the President who healed our Nation after the resignation from office of President Nixon. However, since we have almost a generation elapsed since President Ford held office, I find many people simply are not aware of what was happening at that time and the incredible turmoil that this Nation felt at the time that President Nixon was undergoing examination by the Congress, facing impeachment, and eventually resigning from office.

When President Ford took that office, he, in a very calm and deliberate manner, proceeded to heal this Nation. He restored order. He restored financial stability. He reduced interest rates. He improved the economy and showed that our government could survive a crisis like that and function well. For this, he deserves our thanks and our commendation.

Because of this and because of the actions of both President and Mrs. Ford, I thought it very deserving that they receive the Congressional Gold Medal. This will be presented to them next